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## THE POLYNESIANS: CAUCASIANS OF THE PACIFIC

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**I**N the oceanic islands of the Pacific three different peoples occur, who have been called Melanesians, Micronesians and Polynesians. These form very distinct divisions. The Melanesians are physically negroid, nearly black with crisp, curly hair, flat noses and thick lips. Although nothing is known of their origin, it is supposed that they came from Africa and were the earliest occupants of the oceanic world. They now occupy the western portion of the Pacific islands south of the equator including Fiji, the New Hebrides, the Solomon group and the Bismarek Archipelago.

The Micronesians are of Malay stock much modified by Melanesian, Micronesian and even Chinese and Japanese crossings. They are short, often stunted in form, and have a dark brown complexion. They inhabit the western portion of the Pacific islands north of the equator, including the Marshall Islands, the Gilbert Islands, the Caroline Islands and Guam.

The Polynesians represent a branch of the Caucasian race who migrated in a remote period, possibly in the Neolithic age, from the Asiatic mainland. They have a distinct European cast of feature, have a light brown or olive complexion, and are the physical superiors even of Europeans. They inhabit all the eastern group of islands both north and south of the equator, including the Hawaiian, Marquesan, Society, Cook, Tonga and Samoan Islands.

The Micronesians, few in number and inhabiting a relatively small area of Oceanica, have been of little interest to other peoples; the Melanesians, black and savage, with a history of horror after horror, have been repellent to explorers and remain in a darkness comparable to the darkness of central Africa. But the Polynesians have cast a charm over the civilized world. They are perhaps the handsomest people extant. The men average six feet in height, are strongly muscled, free from fat, swift in action, graceful in repose; the women are often of rare beauty, with regular features and wondrous large, dark eyes. In character they are exceedingly merry, gentle, courteous and hospitable. Unless mistreated or under some misapprehension they have been almost universally friendly

to the white man; the stranger coming to their shores and passing through their villages ever and anon receives the greeting "aloha," and his departure is often the cause of sadness or weeping on the part of the islanders who may have known him at most but a few days. When Robert Louis Stevenson was about to leave the Marquesas—*islands owned by France*—Stanislao Moanitini, chief of Akau, sadly addressed him with these words: "Ah vous devriez rester ici, mon cher ami. Vous êtes les gens qu'il faut pour les Kanaques; vous êtes doux, vous et votre famille; vous seriez obéis dans toutes les îles."

Nowhere does any people possess a deeper passion for color; wreaths or "leis" of flowers have always been a part of their everyday attire. Their personal cleanliness is remarkable. For them no day would be complete without a bath in one of their beautiful streams or lakes followed by an anointing of the entire body with a fragrant oil.

With these people cultured Europeans have not hesitated to form marriages, to live among them, sensitive natures have counted the world well lost, and about them has grown up a romance of story and song that has caught the interest of the civilized world. There is a saying that he who has seen Tahiti will never wish to leave it.

Their history prior to the discovery of their islands by Europeans has been learned partly through study of their characteristics, partly through study of their language, but principally through their traditions and legends. Though many examples of their rude hieroglyphics or picture symbols have been found, little has been learned from this source. The appearance and characteristics of the people point at once to a Caucasian lineage. The roots of their language point to the same conclusion. This being so, they could have come only from Asia. All their legends point to the west as the cradle of the race, and their dead are supposed to go to their future life west—naturally back to the *home* of the race. But supposing they did come from Asia, how did they ever reach Samoa and Tahiti and Hawaii? Hawaii is over 4,000 miles from Asia and only 2,000 from San Francisco. How could these people traverse two thirds of the Pacific in their canoes? Doubtless they came from island to island through the Malay Archipelago until they reached Samoa, but from there they had 2,000 miles of open ocean to traverse to reach Hawaii. How was it possible to accomplish this sail from the west when the prevailing winds and currents were from the northeast? The answer to this question lies in the character of the people. There is evidence that in the past they were the most daring and skilled navigators the world has

ever known. They built two-decked canoes of plank large enough to carry big stores of food and water and even livestock. They possessed a knowledge of the stars and steered their course by them. That they must have come this way is further evidenced by the fact that an intelligent Polynesian of Hawaii can understand almost everything that a Samoan says even though the islands lie so far apart, and, except for the several waves of colonization, have had no intercourse with each other prior to the arrival of the European. Nearly all the ethnologists are agreed upon this theory of the origin of the race. At the present time further investigations are being made by the Bishop Museum and Yale University. Their work is only half completed, but already they have collected a vast amount of information which it is believed will still further corroborate the accepted theory.

Arrived at the islands the Polynesians found conditions admirably suited to their needs. The soil, usually being of volcanic origin, was fertile and covered with a rich vegetation, including the taro, the bread-fruit, the sweet potato, the yam and the banana. The waters about the islands abound in fish, and though no edible animals appear to have been indigenous, the early settlers brought with them pigs which flourished in both a wild and domestic state and have always been highly regarded as a food by the natives.

For many centuries they led a savage but contented existence here, completely shut off from the rest of the world. Happy would they have been if they could have remained in this seclusion! Early Spanish navigators touched at some of the smaller islands and by the eighteenth century all of the main groups were known. The Hawaiian Islands were the last to be discovered, being unknown until an English navigator, Captain James Cook, landed there in 1778.

At the time of discovery the different groups of islands were in various stages of advancement, the Samoans being the most civilized and the Marquesans the most savage. All of them were living in a feudal state, similar to that which prevailed in Europe in medieval times. The chiefs owned all the land and parcelled it out among their followers, who however were not bound to the land but if dissatisfied could transfer their allegiance to some other chieftain. For many years there had been waging almost continual internecine wars which must have limited the population even before discovery.

Since the coming of the European many changes have taken place in government, mode of living and religion. The islands are no longer independent. The Marquesan and Society Islands belong to France; the Cook and Tonga Islands belong to Great

Britain; the Hawaiian Islands and part of Samoa belong to the United States. The people have largely abandoned their ancient manner of living and adopted that of the European. One of their most peculiar systems was that of the tabu. The tabu was a prohibition of certain articles or certain acts and was religious in character. Anyone who violated a tabu was supposed to be visited by a certain malady and, unless the proper remedial measures were taken, in three days' time to die. Anyone could tabu anything that belonged to him, but there were a great many tabus of universal application. The following are examples: men and women were compelled to eat in separate houses, and women could not cook over a fire built by a man. Women were not allowed to eat certain food such as bananas, cocoanuts and pork. Women could not enter any canoe, but if they desired to cross any river or lake or reach a ship had to swim. A commoner was prohibited from crossing the shadow of a chief. At certain tabu periods no sound could be heard, no fire could be lighted, even the dogs were muzzled and fowls tied up. For various reasons the system is now overthrown.

The simple dress of the people, which consisted for the men of a loin cloth, for the women of a short girdle of leaves, has been changed for the more elaborate dress of the European. The native houses made of bamboo poles and thatch have given place to houses of wood. Even the occupations have changed. Formerly the native did little work aside from picking and cooking his food, spearing fish and making his simple dress and implements. Now many products are raised for export, the cultivation of sugar especially having become the main industry of most of the islands. The native religion, with its many gods, its prayers and its songs, has yielded to Christianity, the islanders accepting the new religion en masse. Doubtless the acceptance in many cases has been largely a matter of form, for the inhabitants in times of trouble still secretly address prayers to their ancient gods.

Since the coming of the foreigner the Polynesians, despite their wonderful physique, have alarmingly decreased in numbers. Captain Cook estimated the population of the Hawaiian Islands at 420,000; to-day there are only 24,000 Hawaiians of pure blood. The Tahitians numbered 150,000 in 1774, fell to 17,000 in 1880 and to 10,300 in 1899. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century the decrease has been in Tonga from 30,000 to 17,500; in the Cook group from 11,500 to 8,400; in Manakini from 1,600 to 1,000; and in Easter Island from 600 to 100. In the valley of Typee in the Marquesas, where Herman Melville was so kindly treated, from a tribe which formerly boasted 4,000 fighting men only a dozen wretches have survived.

Such a decrease can be only partly accounted for by the wars, massacres and raiding for the South American and Australian slave trade before this traffic was stopped. A more important cause is the introduction of diseases by foreigners. Sickness was almost unknown to the Polynesians prior to the coming of the foreigners, and consequently they lacked the toxin in their blood which renders other peoples partially immune. A mild disease has been known to carry them off by the thousands; a single epidemic of measles once destroyed a tenth of all the natives of the Hawaiian Islands. Their swift change of habits has also rendered them the victims of many plagues. The Polynesian is amphibious by nature and as much at home in the water as out of it. In his scant native costume he would quickly dry off upon emerging from the water and be no worse off for his bath. Having adopted the trousers and shirt of the European he still goes into the water with his clothes on, insisting that if clothes are good they are good *all* the time. The clothes remain wet after he emerges and bring a heavy toll upon life in the forms of pneumonia and tuberculosis. The replacement of the native hut by the wooden house has exposed the native to the same plagues. The hut, made of thatch, was always well ventilated because of the looseness of its structure; the wooden house, of which the native persistently refuses to open the windows at night, is close and stuffy. The prohibition of the joyous native pastimes by over-zealous missionary endeavor, together with the lugubriousness of some of the things taught him, has depressed the native, rendering him an easier prey to the ravages of disease. The introduction of rum and opium has been a calamity to him, weakening and degrading him more than "fire-water" has degraded the American Indian.

From every point of view the coming of the foreigner has been an immeasurable curse to the Polynesian. Left to themselves the Islanders could be living to-day in a paradise unvisited by the plagues, pestilence and calamities that attack mankind now the world over. Before the visitation of the European and the Asiatic their flowery isles set in the midst of dark blue seas were far removed from every beast of prey, every poisonous serpent, every malady rising from the congested slums of earth. The gentle people led a carefree existence, spending much of their time swimming, riding the surf, playing at their sports of wrestling, boxing and football, dancing their expressive folk-dances of love and goodwill.

How changed is it all now! From the east and from the west have come calamities. The mosquito, the rat, the mongoose have arrived; though there are still no snakes, some fool will doubtless

soon import a couple of rattlers. The crews of the ships brought syphilis, which among a people with loose ties of marriage was bound to rage terribly; the Chinese brought leprosy, a disease unknown in the islands prior to 1848, but now there are nearly a thousand victims of this terrible plague segregated on the island of Molokai in the Hawaiian group. The changed conditions of living have resulted in a holocaust of death from pneumonia and tuberculosis, while measles and smallpox have done their worst among a people unable to withstand them. The Polynesian is perishing. Stopped are the games and the hulahula dances, forgotten are the songs of the fathers. Yet a little while and the rippling flow of his language, more like music than like speech, will have vanished from the earth; soon the very "aloha" will be heard no more. The Polynesian understands his fate. With a smile half sad, half hopeless, he looks forward to the day when he will be but a memory among the race of men.